13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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and purchasing boards, it is still a powerful commercial and social force in the rest of Ireland. In fact the numbers of fairs have increased with the post-famine dominance of the cattle trade, though they have tended to be concentrated in fewer centres as many small fair-towns have been by-passed by improved means of communication. On the other hand the weekly markets have declined or disappeared, their place taken by shops which typically handle drinks as well as groceries, clothing as well as hardware. Thus the fair has retained and even strengthened its magnetic hold on the countryfolk, and though many of its subsidiary functions have been taken over by institutions of more recent origin, the fair itself retains a pagan aura. There is a widespread belief, by no means confined to Ireland, that fair days are always rainy days. This belief may well be justified by climatic averages, but I have heard it explained as a consequence of the lies and profanity, the fights and pagan ways of the fair. Many an ancient fair has become extinct, no doubt because it no longer fulfilled its economic functions, but the explanation usually given is that it was abandoned 'on account of the fighting'.

In Europe, north of the Alpine mountains, the fair as a means of exchange and social intercourse is an institution older than the town, and older far than Christianity. The periodic assemblies of early Celtic Ireland served as temporary towns, and it was probably these sites which Ptolemy marked as cities on his map of the second century A.D. They were held on hill-tops hallowed by an antiquity which archaeology has in some instances traced back to the Bronze Age, and the regions which they served were, we have suggested, already taking shape in the late Neolithic period. Ireland has a number of large enclosures of Neolithic date analogous to Windmill Hill in Wiltshire, which apparently functioned as seasonal meeting places where stock was rounded-up and sorted. An enclosure of rather different type but of similar age—the Giant's Ring near Belfast—was the scene of horse-racing down to recent centuries. On the cairn-crowned Cave Hill, too, overlooking Belfast, crowds used to assemble on Easter Monday 'in accordance with immemorial usage'.[1] We may see in the 'parles

[1] J. B. Doyle, *Tours in Ulster* (1855), 102.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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upon hills', which the Dublin government found so obnoxious in the sixteenth century, the persistent efforts of the Irish to maintain their ancient rights and customs of public assembly. In the Anglo-Norman period and again during the plantations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries towns were deliberately established with the intention of bringing 'civilized ways of living to the wild Irish'. Many of them are characterized by a wide street or square—the 'diamond' in Northern Ireland—where fairs and other gatherings could be dominated and controlled from a castle which overlooked it. These urban settlements were known to the Irish, whose native 'towns' were rarely anything more than disorderly clachans, as 'street towns'. They are found scattered at fairly regular intervals all through the countryside, usually at some river crossing or hill gap where routeways meet. Some of them, well-placed in good fertile country, have expanded, while others have decayed or remained mere villages. Often one will find not far away the old Fair Hill from which the fair was attracted as the facilities of the town outweighed the traditional pull of the inconvenient hill-top. But for long the Irish kept to their own fairs which continued, according to an Act of 1481, to 'take great customs and profits to the depression of the boroughs and the trading towns'.[1] The old assembly places are not entirely forgotten, and it often happened that they were visited for games and horse-racing long after they had lost their function as places of commerce. They are celebrated in local ballads and their sites can still be traced by the grassy mounds which are the remains of booths and cattle pens. The lost fairs of Ireland deserve a study such as is being made of the lost villages of England, but the chief sources for such a study, in the absence of records, must lie in field work and the fast-fading memories of the countryside.

The fairs were formerly organized in a recognized sequence of goods and livestock, terminating in sports and horse-racing—and not infrequently in bloodshed. Several of them achieved a notoriety which made their names a byword, and among them none was more notorious, owing partly no doubt to its proximity to Dublin, than Donnybrook Fair. The Parliamentary Gazetteer of 1845 forgets its sober purpose in thus describing

[1] T. W. Freeman, *Ireland*, 95.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

household. Some cats have reverted to a wild state and roam the back of the island, sheep occasionally are killed by hungry dogs, and young people will entertain themselves by baiting dogs to fight. By and large, animals, especially asses, in Inis Beag are treated roughly or with indifference.

Fishing

It is estimated that between 30 and 50 three-men crews from Inis Beag fished regularly almost the year around at the beginning of the century. At that time there were ten families of fisherfolk—six in Low Village, two in High, and one each in the other two communities—who subsisted mainly on money obtained from the sale of their catches or by bartering fish for needed goods and services. Only farming and kelp-making intermittently interfered with the fishing regime of landholders, and fishing ceased altogether only for parts of December and January, when inclement weather and the Christmas season intruded. Women and children were deeply involved in the fishing endeavor, just as they were in farming and livestock rearing, to free their menfolk for fishing. Crews ranged the coast of Inis Beag and neighboring islands, the two sounds, the mainland coast for 20 miles, and Atlantic shallows 5 to 8 miles offshore. Lines 40 fathoms in length were "shot" for ling and cod, and nets over a mile in length were drifted to ensnare spring mackerel. At times when fish were particularly abundant, fishermen would be out daily for a week or two, arising long before dawn to have their lines down before daybreak, and returning home as late as midnight.

Sixty years later, a sharply contrasting situation prevails, wherein not only has the exporting of fish almost been discontinued, but fish no longer rank as a major staple in the diet of the folk and are not even eaten several months of the year. Nine three-men crews fished fairly regularly with nets and lines between February and October of 1960 and exported or sold locally part of their catches, and two crews fished for lobsters. Fishing now is carried on within a mile of the island, and only one crew ventured as far as the mainland in 1960. It was customary in the past for crews to fish for two consecutive days off a mainland peninsula and sleep overnight in their canoes or lodge in a village there, a venture which required over 30 miles of backbreaking labor at the oars. Line fishing today is done in shallow waters, only short nets are employed, and the men do not care to spend long hours at their task. Elders bemoan the present state of affairs for several reasons, one of them being the loss of fishing lore accumulated over the centuries —knowledge of the ocean floor, of deep currents, of the habitats and movements of fish, not to mention knowledge relating to the manufacture and care of fishing gear and fishing techniques themselves.

Most important of the factors which gradually have restricted fishing are the actions of foreign trawlers—particularly Spanish and French ones, the shift of migratory routes of fish, and long range changes in the weather. During the 1890s, foreign trawlers commenced to fish the waters surrounding Inis Beag, and in the decades since they have increased in number and have fished ever closer to the coast, until now they often penetrate within the legal limit. Not only have